

Romans 5:6-11

Dear Friends in Christ,

In an article published the first of this year, Raymond J. Brown wrote “As belief has consequences, so does unbelief...I think the following passage from Thomas Howard...succinctly portrays the gradual loss of Christendom’s strength, numbers, quality, and value among the citizenry of our era.” Thomas Howard, a college professor, wrote this:

I have sometimes given a class the following list of words: majesty, magnanimity, valor, courtesy, grace, chastity, virginity, nobility, splendor, ceremony, taboo, mystery, purity. The reaction is quite predictable: either a total blank, embarrassed snickers, or incredulity.... They don’t know what to do with them.... Majesty? The man must be mad. Courtesy? What a bore. Virginity? Ho-ho - there’s one for you!

And then, commenting on Howard’s passage, Raymond Brown stated: “There is little to add to this, except perhaps to note that this exchange took place at a Christian college. I half wonder if a similar episode at Berkeley would have resulted in a student boycott and investigation of the professor.” (Raymond J. Brown, *Farewell, Old Chessmate*, Touchstone, January/February 2016, p. 31)

Words. Let me ask you this: What word do you think would describe how most of the world and liberal Christianity see the remaining number of churches which battle to stay faithful to the Word of God; the Scriptures? How about the word **repulsive**.

Here’s another question: Will we remain faithful to the Word - especially in these next years? Let’s look at some of the most world **repulsive** words imaginable. Let’s consider . . .

WHILE WE WERE

I. Weak.

Our text begins:

For while we were weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person - though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die. (vss. 6-7)

And there it is: **while we were weak**. That was our condition before we were brought to faith. It is the condition of all humanity without Christ. More precisely, we were **powerless**.

And even more precisely, there’s this definition of “weak” which must be considered (and this is from a noted Greek Lexicon; that is, a type of dictionary): “Of a weakness in faith, which, through lack of advanced knowledge, considers externals (everything this world offers) of greatest importance.” Hear, once again, a part of that: “Of a weakness of faith, which...considers externals (this world and the now) of greater importance.” (Bauer, Arndt & Gingrich, A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 115)

By nature, we were mostly concerned with this world; what it offered and what we could get out of it. Our concern about the grave and beyond would momentarily manifest themselves at a funeral. The world doesn’t want to be reminded. It’s too busy with its business. This is the constant struggle for the child of God: absorbed with and distracted by this world.

But look: Paul writes “...at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.” *The right time*. In Galatians, Paul says, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman...” (Gal. 4:4) Time. Timing. God has a time - for everything. He set a time for us to be born, brought to faith and to depart from this world. God impressed this upon Job. Job said, “Man who is born of woman is few of days and full of trouble.... Since his days are determined, and the number of his months is with you, and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass, look away from him...” (Job 14:1,5-6a)

But God doesn't look away. Can you even imagine how those without Christ would respond to all this? Weak? Powerless? Can't move God to love me...if there is a God? This is repulsive to human thinking...at least up to that moment when the final breath softly makes its last earthly whisper.

II. Sinners.

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. (vss. 8-9).

Sinners. Sin. In the article I cited at the beginning of the sermon Raymond J. Brown notes:

Today we see a more barbarian outlook. As G. K. Chesterton warned in *The Ballad of the White Horse*, we may recognize the return of godlessness by the 'detail of the sinning and denial of the sin/by God and man dishonored/ by death and life made vain.' Or we might simply compare the letters published and answered in *Dear Abby* today to those of a generation ago. (p. 31)

It's the words "...we may recognize the return of godlessness by the 'detail of the sinning and denial of the sin...'" that strike a loud bell. We are a culture that relishes its sin; boasts of and broadcasts in every way every vulgarity, desire for killing and death, fulfillment of whatever sexual desire one may have and abhors and will not tolerate any real discussion of human sin and its natural consequences, not to mention the eternal. Hey! Are we awake, here? This is where the world is!!

But look, in spite of this, "...God shows his love for us in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us." And the statement, "justified by his blood" goes further than the fact that He simply died for us. Countless people die without the shedding of blood. The shedding of blood directs us to a real sacrifice made to pay for our very real and damning sin.

Armin J. Panning writes:

...the word used here for God's love is *agape*, the term indicating a one-way, unreciprocated love coming entirely from God. There were no endearing qualities in rebellious humanity that moved or influenced God. It wasn't like in human friendship where both parties bring endearing qualities to the relationship so that a mutual affection develops. No, in the situation Paul is describing, all the good things originate on God's side of the relationship. (Armin J. Panning, *Romans, People's Bible Commentary*, Concordia Publishing House, 2000, p. 82)

III. Enemies.

And finally, our text says,

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. (vss. 10-11)

Enemies. We were God's enemies. All humanity is God's enemy. Put that in front of the great philanthropist, or the celebrity who is loved and admired, or to all who have made contributions and sacrifices for others, but wanted no part of God's love in Christ. Repulsive? Undoubtedly.

However, the encouragement is there: "...we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." We did not do the reconciliation. God did - there on the Cross! And remember this: the struggle with sin continues. A couple of chapters later Paul writes the words we know so well, "...I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members." (Rom 7:23) But, oh, what comfort in these words: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 8:1) Though we struggle with sin, though we sin, through faith in Christ all condemnation is removed. ***Whoever believes has eternal life.***

All religions of the world promise Heaven, or Nirvana, or eternal reward based on the type of life one lived on the earth. Only Christianity - Biblical Christianity and not the "we think and feel" theology of this culture's church - promises eternal life based on the merits of Christ and Christ alone. All the founders of all religions point their disciples to their god. Christ alone says, "I am God!" All, including the atheist and agnostic will deal with that as they take their last breaths.

And since Paul says, "...I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...", we can confidently and lovingly put it in front of others, regardless of how repulsive they find the words *weak, sinners, enemies*. (Rom 1:16)

It's a wonder and a joy, isn't it? We have been moved from ***While We Were Enemies*** to **we are** God's people in Christ.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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Romans 5:6-11: **“While We Were”**

I. *Weak.*

II. *Sinners.*

III. *Enemies.*

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